#### THE BASQUE PEOPLE.

In two successive articles of the "Bulletin Trimestriel de la Societe Ramond." M. Eugene Cordier has given a description of some of the laws and customs prevailing among the Basques, that singular race dwelling upon the slopes of the Western Pyrenees, whose language and whose origin are alike a puzzle to antiquarians, and who, mustering in all about eight hundred and forty thousand souls, have contrived to maintain what may fairly be called their nationality distinct from both France and Spain. The governments of these countries have striven hard to extirpate the old Basque tongue, but though it is at length gradually yielding, yet it has shown a strange and most obstinate vitality. Besides this, the Basques possess a system of legislation on such social subjects as the succession to property, parental and conjugal rights, and the rights and powers of women, of such completeness and specialty as is rarely to be found in Europa. Some of these laws, and of the national customs, may be interesting to our readers. For

sieur Michel's interesting work, "Le Pays

The Basques are physically a fine race, though goitre and cretinisme are by no means unknown among them. As a rule, however, the men are tall, brave, and active, and possess considerable though uncultivated intelligence. Michel tells how Gonzalo Fernaudez de Cordova was provoked to exclaim that "he had rather have lions to guard than Biscayens to govern," and points out how the energy and perfect health of the Basque peasant make him, even after a hard day's work, scorn repose in the chimney nook, and seek instead recreation in dances, or athletic sports. Bull-fights are among their favorite diversions, but they are of the less cruel kind; that is, the bull is not killed, but replaced, when tired, by a fresh one. Sometimes, also, a bull, or even a cow is restrained by a rope, and all comers are invited to try their skill and agility, with just sufficient risk to render the sport exciting. Sometimes a jar, with a mouth much smaller than the interior, is imbedded in the centre of the arena; a child placed in it, strikes the bull as he approaches, and then ducks into his jar, vanishing utterly into the ground, much to the animal's amazement as he makes his rush. The Jeu de Paume, a kind of tennis, has long been a passion with the Basques. The name of a first-rate player flies from village to village, until it becomes a household word in the most remote mountain cottage. At the time of the first French revolution, one Perkain, who had taken refuge in Spain, heard that his rival, Carutchet, was challenging players in France. He could not resist the temptation. He crossed the frontier, played, wou, and escaped safe back to Spain, applauded and assisted by thousands. To be either player or spectator of the game, a Basque will willingly walk during the whole of the preceding and following nights; soldiers desert their regiments to be present; some have unexpectedly appeared on the appointed day even from the banks of the Danube. Under the empire, fourteen soldiers of one regiment left the army without permission, journeyed to the distant St. Etienne de Baigorry, played their game and were back on the banks of the Rhine in the nick of time for the battle of Austerlitz. Wagers are freely made upon the game, but etiquette prescribes that no man shall back a player who does not speak his dialect. It is not thought dishonorable in a player to play below his strength at first in order to tempt the ring to put their money on his adversaries. It is fraudulent, however, if he intend ulti-

mately to lose. Dancing is another delight. Here is an amusing description, from Monsieur Michel, of a genuine Basque evening. You, the reader, are supposed to be a stranger, and to find yourself near a mountain hamlet on a cold winter night. You resolve to ask for hospitality at a certain house, being sure, from its ruddy glow, that a merry company

are assembled within. The door being opened, you find yourself in a spacious kitchen. An enormous log blazes on the hearth, around which a cheerful party is assembled. On the right sits an old man in an ancient wooden armchair, consecrated by the use of genera-Near him sit other venerable men, and behind is a group of the young men of the village. On the left are the women and girls, spinning wool or the fine flax of he country. You are cordially received, and the circle opens to admit you to the warmest place by the roaring fire, but beware of expecting any further deference! Whatever may be your rank in civilized society, you are entitled here to no more than the courtesy due to a welcome visitor. Soon begins a catechism which your superior knowledge is supposed to enable you to answer. What news is stirring? What are the morals, customs, religions, languages of other countries? How must one figure to oneself Paris, and Bordeaux, and so on? At first your replies are not received without a shade of suspicion; a thousand questions are put, and small objections raised, so as to detect any inconsistencies in your meplies. But you have answered honestly: your replies have been clear, serious, and truthful, and so you come out unscathed from the ordeal. Then, indeed, you rise to the position of an honored guest, Each vies with the other in making much of you and in appreciating your merits; the women and girls, for the first time, take part in the questioning; the grey-beards plunge into politics, and philosophize at their ease; the hours glide swiftly by, and only among the group of young men, a certain restless-ness about the feet betrays their fear lest the time for the mutchico, or Saut Basque, should be forgotten. But at length some jovial mountaineer, whose white hairs have not rendered him oblivious of his youth, turns suddenly round, claps his hand with a merry houp! and strikes up the national air. In a moment half-a-dozen young fellows are describing the semicircle according to which the movements of the dance are to be executed; every other man turns his back to the fire. and constitutes himself a judge. Silence is established, and the old men, especially, look gravely on, inexorable to any newfangled innovation or ill-executed step. Watch that young fellow whose dancing is voted perfect; his figure straightened, his shoulders well down, his head slightly bowed, his arms hanging with careful care-

that he is sensible of the solemn responsi-

trial of skill. Two sticks are crossed at right angles, and the object of the dancer is to continue a series of marvellous evolutions from one angle to the other for so long a time as to tire out the musician who performs the accompaniment. If he succeed, with a bound he seizes the sticks, and his triumph is complete. A Basque proverb says, "A good jumper may often be found under a bad cloak," meaning that a poor dress may cover a noble heart.

The honor of executing the first mutchica (from mutchico, boys, or young men) after one of the pastoral representations of which the Basques are passionately fond, is put up to auction, and is so hotly competed for by the young men of different parishes, that the successful commune has frequently to pay a hundred and fifty or two hundred francs. The privilege of dancing the second, and then the third, is also sold to the highest bidders, the sum released going far towards defraying the expenses of the temporary theatre, which is opened gratis to the spectators. Many of the pastorals are of a sacred character, and are drawn from the Bible or the lives of

'c. others turn upon the struggle between and the cross, or upon the death dresses needed for these of Roland, The representations cost a chests of every tained by ransacking the chests of every chateau or bourgeois house in the neighborhood, the owner being bound by curtom to lend for the purpose whatever he may chance to possess of beautiful or antique; should he refuse, some means would doubtless be found of making him smart for his churlish-

ness. Under these circumstances dramatic accuracy of costume is not to be expected: but the savagery of the Mussulman princes is duly suggested by their blood-red garments, their head dresses of cylindrical shape, adorned with plumes and little looking-glasses, and their large, clumsy boots, Not many years ago another and more questionable kind of pastoral—now discouraged by the police—was in vogue. If a matrimonial scandal shocked a village, instead of being treated to the "rough music," common still in some

parts of England, the offending husband or wife was caricatured upon the stage. A poet was sent for (and every Basque is more or less of a rhymester), to whom every attainable detail was related, and whose business it then was to compose a kind of sarcastic drama for the occasion, and as the identity of the offender was made clear by the actor who personated him mimicking, as exactly as he could, his dress, voice, and manner, the unlucky spouse who had drawn upon himself or herself this stinging punishment might well yow amendment for the future.

Mock courts of justice used also to be held, for the purpose of putting down social vices, and testing the eloquence of the young men. A grand procession, with music, dancers, etc., inaugurated the day. The actors representing the persons con-cerned in the misdeed were drawn slowly along in a carriage, preceded by an usher, mounted on donkey-back, with his face tailward, and surrounded by harlequins and policinelli. Arrived at the court, the prisoner was accused and defended at great length by two advocates; solemn messages were despatched to the Senate, the Ministers, and even the King, entreating advice. At length the case was decided; the accused was convicted, and sentenced to death; he escaped, but was heroically recaptured, and the sentence was on the point of execution, when a courier was beheld arriving in breathless haste, who proves to be the bearer of a royal pardon. This usually terminated the proceedings, and judge and advocates were wont to give place to the musicians, and to wind up the evening with a

Women and girls do not, as a rule, take part in the acting of these pastorals, though in private houses they also some times dance the mutchico: but they are by no means behind their husbands and brothers in energy and fine health. They take their full share in the labors of the field, and it is a saying among the Spanish Basques that the country is never better cultivated than when, all the men being gone to the wars, it is left to the sole management of the women. Their strength being thus developed, their children come into the world with the greatest ease, and more than one baby passed its first day of life in the shade of the tree beneath which it first saw light, while its mother the In resumed her work. general, however, a week's rest is allowed; but the old and strange custom of "la couvade" does not even now seem wholly abandoned in the more remote districts. This custom consists in the mother of a new-born child giving up her place to its father, who remains in bed with the infant for a period varying from a few hours to four days, during which time he feasts with his friends, while the wife cooks and waits upon the party. It is a moot point among the curious how this extraordinary custom originated.

The first striking peculiarity in the Basque succession law is the rigid rule of primogeniture, applied "without distinction of sex or person (noble or not), of property, movable or fixed, private or common (between a married couple), in direct and collateral line, to relatives of all degrees, and to their descendants and representatives forever." Should the heir consent to the alienation of property under pressing need, the liberty to redeem it remains with him and his successors, in Soule during forty years, in Labourt in perpetuity; and in old times, if a stranger acquired fixed property among the French Basques, every purse was opened to assist in effacing, by means of this right, what was regarded as a national disgrace. The future of the eldest of the family thus secured, the younger children are almost without rights; and they are considered in the light of born servitors, or, as they used to be called, slaves: though, according to Bela, emancipation is possible at five-and-twenty. In the valley of Bareges they take no part in the municipal elections, and, in general, the rights and privileges of citizens are denied them. Their parents or relations put aside some small sum for them, which is strictly prevented from encroaching on the rights of the eldest, and should the younger brother or sister refuse to serve until marriage in the house of the fortunate heir, or, leaving it, to bring home all gain elsewhere earned, even this slight provision may be withheld. A younger brother, in fact, is the unpaid servant of his eldest brother, or sister, until his marriage; should he take a younger daughter for his wife, he cannot become a citizen of her birth-place; but lessness, his serious expression showing he acquires a certain degree of independence. His goods and those of his bility upon him! The girls, meanwhile, are wife are, at least, in common, although in supposed to remain unmoved, but soon the some parts the wife is free to enter into chairs begin to creak, and, as if of their contracts without the sanction of her husown accord, turn slightly from the hearth, and towards the centre of the room. Many band, the fulfilment of the engagement being, however, deferred until his death. a stolen glance from many a bright eye criti-But should be marry an heiress, not only does cises or encourages the performers, who are by no means insensible to their rays. More she remain head of the family (a position and more active grows the dancer, more and sometimes indicated by a particular costume), more springy becomes the step, until at last but he fails to gain personal independence.

that of his wife; which, again, is derived from her house, each dwelling retaining its own name, which must be borne by its successive owners. Even in cases where the husband is possessed of independent wealth, but lives upon the property of his wife, the rights of the head of the family remain intact. He cannot remove either his children or his wife from her house; he cannot give permission to his younger sons to leave the maternal roof, though his wife may do so. Should she leave him a widower, her mother,

if living, has, at Bareges, more authority over his children than he has himself. He is not allowed to administer their property, nor to be master of their house; without their consent he cannot bring home a second wife: and, in Soule, where the epoux dotal enjoys a quarter of the property of his deceased wife, he is not permitted to establish a second wife upon even this share, without the consent of the surviving grandparent. Should he be childless, his dowry is, indeed, returned to him; but, like the Irish tenant, he has no security for any improvements made upon his

wife's property.

Generally speaking, every wife is free to make a will, at the age of eighteen, without the consent of her husband; in Soule a girl who has inherited her property may bequeath at fifteen. The consent of the head of the house is indeed needful to the marriage of the eldest child in extreme youth; later, however, not only is he (and exactly the same rule applies to a daughter's case) free to marry without consent, but if he pay the dowry which he received with his wife into the hands of the proprietory parent, the latter is compelled to share his goods, and even his house, with the newly-married couple. Among the French Basques a similar arrangement takes place in the second, and even in the third generation; separate houses are frequently built for the accommodation of the young households; but if there be but one, it must be shared. Such a plan, it need scarcely be said, does not conduce to family harmony, especially as, where only one parent survives, should he, after the division, be guilty of waste or extravagance in the management of his share, it may be taken from him, and added to the portion of the younger pair. In Soule, the magistracy is hereditary, and devolves upon "the sieurs ou demoiselles" of

certain noble families. The ladies do not, however, exercise the privilege, but they transmit it to their eldest sons, or can secure it to their husbands, if they be judged worthy of the honor. Although women do not, nowedays, take part in public matters among the Basques, yet there is evidence to show that they formerly did so, at least to some extent. In the year 1316, the Abbe of Lavedan having consulted the inhabitants of Cau-terets, who were his serfs, upon the subject of changing the site of their town, the question was put to the vote, and an authentic document is still extant bearing the names of the voters. Among these are many names of women, of which only one corresponds with that of any man upon the list. They were not, therefore, married to any of the masculine voters. They may have been wives of younger sons, to whom no vote was accorded, or widows, or unmarried women in possession of their property. Monsieur Lagrese, whose re-searches disinterred this doonment, justly points to the sub-ject as one which deserves further investigation. We commend it to the notice of those who wish to see women admitted to a share in the franchise, and even now, should any of Mr. Mill's disciples stray, in their summer wanderings, to the beautiful little village of St. Jean de Luz, at the foot of the Western Pyrenees, they may have the pleasure of observing a people among whom

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